

## 2023 Ohio Conference on Service and Volunteerism Guide to Effective Proposal Submissions

### WRITING AN EFFECTIVE PROPOSAL

As reviewers examine each proposal for how well it meets established criteria, they are also looking for a balance of topics in each content focus area and a balance of session structure and delivery methods within the focus areas. An outstanding proposal may not be accepted simply because there are too many of that type. Focus areas are listed on the RFP Guidelines.

Before choosing your proposal topic, carefully review and consider all the possibilities outlined in this call for proposals. If your preferred topic is "tried and true," what new and different perspective could you offer? How narrowly and deeply could you focus your topic to explore its underlying implications? How might your topic be transferable to new areas of application? How uniquely might you approach the way you deliver the content using effective adult learning principles and practices?

#### What can you do to ensure your proposal stands out?

##### **1) Use Adult Learning Principles and Practices**

Too often, conference workshop sessions are structured the way many of us experienced learning while growing up: a "sage on the stage" delivers his/her knowledge to a group of eagerly listening participants. In contrast, extensive research has clearly shown the impact of key principles in the way adults learn. Keep these principles top-of-mind as you develop your proposal and, if accepted, your session or workshop.

- *Adults are active and self-directed:* they generally take personal responsibility for discovering what they need to successfully reach their goals.
- *Adults have a 'readiness to learn' based on their personal circumstances:* choices about attending a conference and deciding which sessions and workshops to attend are driven by specific needs for information and skills.
- *Adults need to know the relevancy of learning to their specific challenges:* a connection must be made between the information presented and the participants' situations and environments.
- *Adults bring their life experiences to learning:* they learn more effectively when content builds on what they already know.
- *Adults can learn from each other as well as from the presenter(s):* they will expect to share ideas and experiences with the presenter and with fellow participants in generating steps for practical application of what they learn.

## 2) Write Clear and Focused Learning Objectives

Know from the beginning what the desired outcomes of a session or workshop will be for the learners. Developing learning objectives requires you to think deeply about your topic. The objectives serve as a framework to ensure focused content, engaging delivery, and applicability to participants. Objectives also help participants evaluate the session or workshop based on how well the objectives were accomplished. In their simplest form, learning objectives provide the answer to this question:

- *What should the audience know or be able to do when the session or workshop is over?*

Objectives are desired results, from the learner's perspective, of what is necessary for them to learn about the topic and what information is important. Objectives help learners decide which sessions and workshops will best meet their needs, since they will be able to compare what each option will provide against the skills or knowledge they need.

Objectives also serve as the basis for session design and development. Rather than focus on what the content will cover, focusing on what the learner should know or be able to do when the session is over helps to ensure that the only content presented is that which gives learners what they need.

### How Many Objectives are Needed?

The number of objectives that can be comfortably accomplished in a conference session or workshop is heavily dependent upon its length. A general guideline would be 2-3 objectives for a 60 or 75-minute session.

Keep in mind that objectives help focus the content. They should be learner-centered, very specific, and realistically achievable within the timeframe allotted to the session.

### Three Types of Objectives

Learning objectives are behavior-based and learner-centered, and they may focus on developing attitudes, skills, or knowledge. They should contain specific action verbs that imply observable results. Words like learn, know, or understand are not observable and therefore should not be used.

Follow this sample list of action verbs to use for each type of objective and sample objectives designed to give you some ideas. This is not a complete list of possibilities; there are many other words you can use.

The key is to use action verbs, requiring observable behavior:

Types of Learning	Example	Related Action Verbs		
<b>Attitude Development</b> Appropriate when you want to change people's attitudes or increase their awareness of or sensitivity to certain issues or ideas.	Following the session, participants will be able to critically evaluate their recruitment strategies for generating a diversity of volunteers.	adjust	engage	realize
		choose	express	recall
		criticize	evaluate	select
		decide	identify	support
<b>Skill Development</b> Appropriate when a specific task or procedure needs to be performed.	Following the session, participants will be able to write a plan for low-cost marketing efforts.	analyze	design	prepare
		assess	develop	solve
		compute	measure	speak
		demonstrate	prove	write
<b>Knowledge Development</b> Appropriate when the learner needs to demonstrate acquired knowledge, comprehend information, and/or analyze concepts.	Following the session, participants will be able to recognize challenges and opportunities of varied social media strategies.	acquire	describe	learn
		cite	differentiate	list
		compare	identify	recognize
		define	contrast	repeat

## **Select Interactive Delivery Methods**

When participants work together to solve a problem or discuss an issue, the value they take from the learning experience increases significantly. During the submission process, you will be asked to share how you plan to include active learning in your session. In workshop formats and sometimes in conference sessions — you can easily use more than one method for engaging your audience in the learning process. In fact, conference workshop proposals should include more than one participant activity that will facilitate delivery of the content in accordance with the proposed objectives.

In determining how to create an active learning environment in the session or workshop, begin with your learning objectives. How will participants use the content when they return to their jobs? How can you help them learn so they will be able to use it successfully? If the topic is complex, for example, you may want to create an exercise that enables participants to get hands-on experience trying something new in a safe, group-learning environment.

Here are some methods you can use to involve your learners:

### **Brainstorming**

Generate ideas and enthusiasm

### **Dialogue**

Explore an issue and develop perspectives

### **Nominal group technique**

Help participants ask questions anonymously or generate a lot of ideas from a large group quickly

### **Peer-assisted learning**

Knowledgeable participants help others do an exercise

### **Reflection**

Enhance personal learning and its application to participants

### **Story-telling**

Gain new perspectives on issues and provide examples of experiences that demonstrate the value or importance of material presented

### **Take the pulse**

Find out what the participants know about the topic, what work they have already done on the topic, or what obstacles they have encountered

Please note: Leaving time for a Q&A segment at the end of a lecture is not considered true audience engagement for the purpose of learning, and proposal reviewers will expect more. In your proposal, you will be asked to outline how you will engage the audience throughout your presentation.

Other tips for an interactive delivery:

- Limit PowerPoint slides by focusing on key points, instructions for activities, etc. rather than listing all content (3-5 bullets per slide). Avoid reading your PowerPoint to the participants.
- Provide a handout that allows participants to include their own insights, results of group exercises, questions they want to explore further, etc.
- Give participants an assignment to complete after the conference to help ground learning and apply it once they're back at work.
- Especially in workshops, get people up and moving around by doing group activities. You can also ask participants to stand in place or group together in response to questions you ask, rather than just raising hands.

### **Write a Descriptive Title**

Your title is what potential participants read first. It should capture, in 10 words or less, the key concept behind why someone should attend this presentation instead of others held at the same time. Give serious thought to what your session or workshop will be about and what participants will take from it before writing your title.

An effective title is short, clear, and uses active language. Your title should serve as the headline of your proposal, and ensure that the reviewers (and potential participants!) want to learn more. Some participants will only read your title, so it is important that participants can determine what your presentation will cover just from the title.

If your submission is accepted, all aspects of your proposal (title, description, learning, objectives, presenter bios, etc.) will be used in conference promotional material (in print and on the Web).

### **Write a Compelling Description**

Your primary goal in developing your session or workshop proposal should be participant learning, not providing a showcase for your own ideas, opinions, experiences, products, or services. Providing great value to participants, including something tangible they can use immediately, is the key. Put yourself in the learner's place, and create a learning opportunity and description that would inspire you to attend, participate, and learn!

You will be asked to write a brief description of your presentation for use in the conference event Web site and printed program.

Write as clearly and concisely as possible, ensuring all necessary information is included. Focus on what participants will take away from the presentation and on the specific content to be delivered. Avoid writing an editorial on the topic or an advertisement for the facilitator(s).

### **Required: A More In-Depth Description**

To help reviewers evaluate your proposal, you will be asked specific questions on the following topics:

- How participants will be able to apply what they learn from this session or workshop; e.g. will they be able to replicate a program, share information with colleagues to enhance operations, apply policies or regulations correctly, or interview volunteers more effectively? Be specific.
- How you will involve the audience in your session; e.g. techniques you will use to ensure the session incorporates effective adult learning principles and practices?